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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: BOSNIA INCHING CLOSER ON VISA LIBERALIZATION

¶1. (U) At its June 4, 2009 session, the Council of Ministers approved and sent to Parliament a package of four draft laws needed to facilitate Bosnia's entry into a visa liberalization regime with the EU. The package includes draft laws on International Legal Aid in Criminal Matters, Border Control, Control of Movement of Arms and Military Equipment, and Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorist Activities. The move came days after Security Minister Tarik Sadovic reportedly visited the RS leadership in Banja Luka to discuss RS objections to the laws. Parliament is expected to consider the draft laws in urgent procedure as early as next week. It also comes roughly a week before the EU issues a report on the progress (or lack thereof) Bosnia and other countries in the Western Balkans are making on visa liberalization. For weeks the press has been speculating that the report will highlight the slow progress Bosnia is making compared to other countries in the region.

¶2. (U) Bosnia must still take several other steps to implement the visa liberalization action plan it was given by the EU. This includes passing other pieces of required legislation, such as a law on anti-discrimination guidelines and another on the movement of hazardous materials. Bosnia must also begin using biometric passports. (Note: We understand that it is currently running tests on these passports and hopes to issue them sometime next year. End note)

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The approval of the four visa liberalization-related laws by the Council of Ministers is a welcome development. However, the laws still need to be adopted by the Parliament. The Council of Ministers' action shows that Bosnian officials and politicians are feeling pressure from the EU, whose officials, including High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and High Rep/EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko, have been criticizing Bosnia for the past six months the slow progress it has been making on an issue that enjoys wide public support. At least in this case, it appears that international pressure and the lure of a benefit from the EU may be able to overcome resistance by RS politicians to laws that they had rejected in the past because the laws might strengthen the role of State-level institutions.
ENGLISH